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Letter dated 4 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit a press release issued on 3 March 2008 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea, entitled, "False accusations cannot undermine the final and binding boundary demarcation decision" (see annex).

I would be most grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Araya **Desta**
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Annex to the letter dated 4 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Press release

False accusations cannot undermine the final and binding boundary demarcation decision

In the last few weeks, the United Nations Secretariat has been engaged in an unwarranted negative press and diplomatic campaign against Eritrea. In spite of those provocations, the Government of Eritrea has opted to engage constructively with the United Nations Secretariat avoiding being marred in this senseless media game.

The aim of tarnishing Eritrea's image with accusations is part of the strategy to deflect the attention from Ethiopia's occupation of sovereign Eritrean territory and to penalize Eritrea for its firm legal stance concerning the final and binding demarcation of the border with Ethiopia. It is astonishing, however, that the United Nations Secretariat is abandoning its neutrality and serving the wishes of Ethiopia and its cohorts.

This partiality and subservience on the part of the United Nations and the Security Council to the needs of Ethiopia and its patrons started long ago. In 2003, Ethiopia publicly rejected the "final and binding" decision of the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission by denouncing it as "illegal, unjust and irresponsible" and requested the Security Council to create an "alternative mechanism". The Security Council should have condemned that gross violation of the Algiers Agreement and immediately endorsed measures to ensure compliance with the terms of the Agreement and maintain its integrity. Regrettably, the Security Council not only ignored the fundamental terms of the treaty but also sought to placate Ethiopia by endorsing "special envoys". Even at this late hour, after the Boundary Commission has formally submitted its demarcation decision to the parties, the Security Council, as exemplified in its resolution 1798 (2008), continues to allude to the "good offices" of the Secretary-General instead of taking action to force Ethiopia to withdraw from sovereign Eritrean territories.

The Government of Eritrea firmly believes that any "alternative mechanisms" and "special envoys" related to the legally resolved border issue are irrelevant and unacceptable and could set a dangerous precedent in international law. The temporary "relocation" of the United Nations Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE), which was effected under the pretext of fuel shortage, and the ensuing media and diplomatic campaign against Eritrea in that regard are just part of the reaction of Ethiopia's appeasers to Eritrea's rejection of the slightest derogation from the final and binding demarcation of the border. Consequently, as outlined below, what transpired surrounding the temporary "relocation" of UNMEE does not justify the criticisms levelled against Eritrea.

Eritrea, as a sovereign country, a primary party to the Agreement which led to the creation of UNMEE and a host to the peacekeeping mission, should have been provided in advance with the details of any changes in the status of the mission and the mission's major movements outside its area of responsibility. However,

notifications and notes verbales from UNMEE on those issues have been incomplete at best and annoying and provocative at worst.

The Government of Eritrea was notified on the afternoon of 12 February that UNMEE had decided to relocate to Ethiopia on the morning of 13 February. The note verbale that was sent by UNMEE did not include any details on the scope and duration of relocation; any legal explanation of its implications for UNMEE's original deployment in terms of the provisions of the Algiers Agreement; or any logistical details in terms of route and other vital information.

The UNMEE Force Commander further informed Eritrean Government authorities in Asmara that, under the relocation, the contingent on sector west would move to Badme, while other contingents would move from the centre to Zalambesa and from the east to Bure. The Force Commander had no answer when asked how it was contemplated to move troops to Badme if this was relocation to Ethiopia. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat later denied and retracted the information.

Concerning the "regrouping" of members of the mission to Asmara, the Department/UNMEE informed the Government of Eritrea about the matter on 22 February, when the bulk of the troops had already arrived. The Government of Eritrea was not provided in advance with the plan for the move or the handling of the Mission's heavy equipment and other necessary details.

Subsequently, the Eritrean Government approached the Department to ascertain United Nations plans concerning UNMEE; however, no such information has been forthcoming. Rather, the Department is sending conflicting messages. In one note verbale, it requested fuel supply and the lifting of restriction of movements for UNMEE to go back to their original sites. Another note verbale, written on the same day, requested the Eritrean Government to take custody of the "equipment" UNMEE may have left on the vacated sites, with no details. The other two notes verbales, sent on 27 February, listed the posts from which they had already withdrawn and requested the Eritrean Government to provide assurances that UNMEE could use the ports and airports in the country in the event that they decided to withdraw their troops and equipment.

The negative press and diplomatic campaign they have been making is not justified and acceptable. The Secretary-General accused Eritrea at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, without even mentioning Ethiopia's refusal to abide by its treaty obligations. The Department, especially UNMEE in Addis Ababa, has been spreading poisonous information, claiming that the lives of UNMEE troops was in danger; they had been denied food supplies; sometimes that they had been forced to regroup; and at other times, they were kept hostage and prevented from relocating to Ethiopia. These days, since many people have found out that the propaganda of the past few weeks was at variance with the facts, they are claiming that Eritrea intends to requisition the weapons of UNMEE.

None of these accusations are based on the facts on the ground. Eritrea has never taken any action that could put the lives of the members of the peacekeeping mission at risk or tampered with their equipment. This whole episode is a manufactured crisis. Washington and Addis Ababa are behind this negative campaign undertaken to shift the attention from the core issue: Ethiopia's occupation of Eritrean territories. Indeed, the baseless media campaign has

emboldened Ethiopia and it is now demanding that the Security Council "impose punitive sanctions" on Eritrea, the victim of its illegal occupation.

The Government of Eritrea regrets the Security Council's entanglement in tangential issues by ignoring the continued illegal occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories by Ethiopia. The illegal occupation is a real threat to the peace, security and stability of the two countries and the region as a whole. The Government therefore reiterates its call on the Security Council to shoulder its legal responsibility and act decisively to end the occupation in the interest of regional and international peace and security.

Regardless of the campaign of disinformation and intimidation, the Government of Eritrea reaffirms that it will hold on to the core issue and the legally concluded final and binding boundary demarcation decision. As to the United Nations Secretariat, the Government expects the body to communicate in advance detailed plans and related information concerning the status and future of UNMEE.

Asmara
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea
3 March 2008